Countdown to sleeping time

The battle at bedtime after a long day can be extremely stressful for many parents.

We all want our children to have enough sleep so that they are well rested and ready for the following day.

Parents also need time of their own in the evenings to unwind after a busy day.

When a child is unable to sleep or is not in a good sleep routine it has an effect on the whole family.

We’ve put together some tips for establishing a bedtime routine and getting children into good sleeping habits.

- **Parenting**
  - Parenting column by Sasha Hart, family care manager at Community Family Care, Stourton.

- **Monitor**
  - All children are different. Some will sleep anywhere and everywhere and others will approach sleep as an enemy and will fight it at all costs.

  The key is to understand what works for your child and incorporate this into your routine.

- **If sleep is an issue for your child, start making a diary to look for triggers to a poor night’s sleep and to identify anything that helps support sleep for your child** – usually there is a pattern.

- **Consistency**
  - The idea of a bedtime routine is that it is just that – a routine. It needs to be consistent each day to allow your child to understand what happens at bedtime and for them to feel relaxed.

  Give your child a reminder at each stage of your routine, such as “after we have a bath we clean our teeth” and “once we’ve cleaned our teeth we put our pyjamas on.” This will also help them to remember what happens at bedtime.

- **Visual routines with the steps written up with pictures can help.**

  Remember that they don’t necessarily fall asleep as soon as they are in bed so factor in time in bed preparing to sleep.

  This could be time reading a story or talking about their day.

  While in bed keep the lights low to support a calm atmosphere.

  If you have more than one child, stagger bedtimes so they can each benefit from your time before bed.

- **Calm**
  - Encourage calm activities before bed, rather than active play. Not all children will recognise when they are tired or feel sleepy, so sometimes we need to help by winding them down and creating a sleep inducing environment.

  Bedtime needs to be relaxing and quiet so try to limit other activity in the house around this time. A warm bath before bed will also help children to start relaxing and get ready for sleep.

- **Incentives**
  - If your child struggles with following the routine use incentives.

    For example, if each evening your child refuses to put their pyjamas on, create a reward chart so that they can earn stickers each time they follow your instructions and put their pyjamas on.

- **Don’t Stress**
  - Small rewards, such as staying up an extra 20 minutes at the weekend, are free and can be good incentives.

- **TIP**
  - If you are stressed by bedtime and feel anxious about trying to get your child to sleep, the chances are your child will pick up on this and it won’t help the situation.

  Getting into a routine takes time and if your child is a difficult sleeper things won’t change straight away.